

The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
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Sunday, July 4, 2004
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 66:10-14; Psalm 66:1-9;
Galatians 6:1-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

Today is the Fourth of July. It is a day in which we celebrate the origins of our country, the foundational ideas and things on which we as Americans center our lives and our thinking. We remember these words from the Declaration of Independence, “**WE** hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness.” And the last sentence which speaks to their commitment to this declaration, “And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm Reliance on the Protection of divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.” We as Americans have certain texts to which we turn to remind us of things to which we are called. In critical moments in our history we harkened back to these words to see if we are being true to our calling. We used them as a touchstone to remember the core of who we are, to those things to which those who went before us were committed.

On November 19, 1863 our president reminded us of our foundation in the Declaration of Independence when he said, “Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.” These are the words that keep us focused on our original purpose and thus shape our lives as Americans. In the same way then this gospel text today calls us to shape our lives to an original purpose, to a calling that we have as disciples, to a calling of those who went before us.

This gospel text is the story of the sending of the seventy-two, or seventy depending on which version of the text you read, this is what Jesus asked his disciples to do. Not just the twelve but rather a significant number of the people who had been following him. In the passage preceding this several had been turned away from being followers of Jesus, they had had put other things before call to be a disciple. But these seventy-two they had faithfully followed and now Jesus was sending them out, Jesus giving them the foundational thoughts on what it is to be a disciple. What it means to be marked with the cross of Christ.

This lesson then fits well with our vision statement for the ELCA a statement to which we focused our Synod assembly this year. It reads “**Marked with the cross of Christ forever, we are claimed, gathered, and sent for the sake of the world.**” We have been marked with the cross of Christ in our baptism. We are claimed to be God’s children and we are gathered here and from here we are sent to the world. Sent as these seventy two were sent by Jesus to the world and his sending and the shape of this sending is foundational to us who have been marked by Christ. It is foundational to us as disciples of Jesus so it is important to look carefully at this story and the way it calls us to discipleship.

The first message that Jesus tells his disciples is that the need is great, the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few. Jesus is telling them that there is a real need to share the good news of the Kingdom of God. There are people who are not aware of the breaking of God into world in the person of Jesus and that has not changed. Oh we would like to say that we live in a Christian community, but the fact is 1 in 2 people living here in Cumberland County have no church affiliation. That means that every other person you meet around you has no faith that they practice and there is a reasonably good possibility that they do know the good news of Jesus Christ. How will they find out if we do not tell them? The harvest is plentiful.

The next thing that Jesus says is, "Therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." That might be better translated, "Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to throw out, to expel laborers into his harvest." The beginning of this work to which we are called is prayer, to recognize that this is not our work, it is the work of the Lord and we are to pray to be thrown out there.

This prayer reminds me of learning to swim. How did you learn? I went to the YMCA where a series of nice people taught me through sets of lessons. Each step you got a badge: minnow, fish, shark. That is not what Jesus asks us to pray for. He asks us to pray to be pitched in the deep end; there is no time for lessons. God throw us out into the harvest.

And then he says "Go on your way." In other words, "Get moving!" Ours is not a mission of sitting around, ours not a mission of build a church and hope people come, ours is a mission of being sent, ours is a mission of getting moving. Do feel the sense that there is a real urgency here? The harvest is ready and it's time to get moving. In this agrarian culture of Jesus time the message would have been clear, time is a wasting, the crop is ready, got to get moving and pack light. Don't take a lot of baggage and in fact don't even stop to greet your friends along the way. Time is of the essence and there is urgency about that to which we are called.

And is this going to be easy? Oh my no! Jesus makes it clear, we are being sent as lambs in the midst of wolves. In fact there are some who will not accept what you have to say. We are being sent and what we have to say will not be accepted. So often people say "I can't share my faith because what if I don't do it well, what if people don't listen?" Jesus tells us this is going to happen. And it is not about us because the ones who listen to Jesus' disciples listen to Jesus. And if they reject the disciples they reject Jesus and the very one who sent him. And what are we to do in the face of rejection? Simply clean up and say the Kingdom of God has come near, which interestingly enough is what we are called to say to those to whom accept us and are healed by our words. Did you see that in the text accepted or rejected our message is the same? This message is God's message. It is our calling to deliver it. Not to be in judgment of those who hear and it effectiveness is not based on us it is the work of the spirit. We are to keep moving and to persevere.

And the places where God's peace makes a difference, what is that to be like? It is a place where we share hospitality and food with those with whom we share God's peace. The things to which we are called are to share at the table, to bring healing to the brokenness, and to proclaim God's love and in breaking of God's kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ, a meal, a promise of healing when people are in pain, and God's word. It is what we model here in our worship on Sunday Morning, the word of God, prayers for healing, and a meal that reminds us of the in breaking of the God's kingdom. Yet this is not enough.

We are called to be sent, to be pitched into the deep end, to go boldly to the entire world sharing what God has done for us. It is the core of who we are as Disciples of Christ, to be sent to the world around us to proclaim what God has done. And it is not easy. It isn't always successful by the world's standard, but it is always faithful. And for us it can be a source of great joy. When we see what a difference it can make in the lives of others

And we do it not because there is a reward. The reward is already ours. Our joy comes in the knowledge that God has loved us and accepted us already; our names are inscribed in heaven. We do it because it is the foundational belief that this is what Jesus has called us to as disciples. On this day that we remember the foundational ideas that established this nation and our commitment to those ideas, may we remember the foundational call that we have as disciples. Jesus has sent us into the world to bring the joy that we have found in Christ to others and to do it with a sense of commitment and urgency because the need around us is great. The harvest is ready. May we persevere as a people sent by God. Amen